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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1307
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4843
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8395
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5957
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 1677
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1794
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RANGOON 000508

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP/MLS, DRL, AND IO
PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#) [EAID](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA'S SENIOR GENERAL SHAKES UP THE MILITARY

REF: A. RANGOON 471
[1](#)B. RANGOON 443
[1](#)C. 07 RANGOON 48

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Classified By: P/E Chief Leslie Hayden for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: On June 20, Senior General Than Shwe announced over one hundred key promotions, retirements, and changes for high and mid-ranking military officers. Three senior members of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) were retired from their military positions, although it is unknown if they were removed from the SPDC. According to informed sources, the changes were made to remove older officers resisting Than Shwe's movement on the regime's "roadmap to discipline-flourishing democracy", quell the growing frustration of talented officers who had been stuck for too long in the middle ranks, and promote more neutral officers to lessen third-ranking General Thura Shwe Mann's influence over the military as Than Shwe prepares him to leave the Army and take a prominent position in politics in [1](#)2010. The top five senior generals remain in place, and Senior General Than Shwe retains almost absolute power. End Summary.

The "Old Man" Shakes it Up

[1](#)2. (C) On June 20, Senior General Than Shwe announced over 100 key promotions, retirements, and changes in Burma's military and in the Cabinet. Three members of the SPDC were retired from their military positions: LT GEN Aung Htwe, Chief of Armed Forces Training; LT GEN Ye Myint, Chief of Bureau of Special Operations 1 (BSO 1); and LT GEN Khin Maung Than, BSO 3. LT GEN Ye Myint supposedly had to retire because of the recent arrest of his son, Aung Zaw Ye Myint, along with business crony Maung Weik, on narcotics charges (Ref B). These three generals could also lose their positions in the SPDC, or their successors might replace them. In the past, membership of the SPDC has been tied to the person and not the position. Some former members of the SPDC, who were forced into retirement or purged, were removed from the SPDC without being replaced, i.e. former Prime Minister Khin Nyunt. No one has ever been added to the SPDC,

and it has shrunk over time from its original 19 members to more or less 12, prior to the announcement of the above three retirements.

13. (C) Other key promotions were the "liberal, forward-thinking" Southern Commander, Major General Ko Ko, to BSO 3 (Bago Division, Irrawaddy Division, Rakhine State); Triangle Commander Major General Ohn Myint to BSO 2 (Kayah State, Shan State); and Northern Commander Major General Ohn Myint to BSO 1 (Kachin State, Sagaing Division, Chin State, Mandalay Division, Magway Division). The other BSOs were not moved, including the powerful BSO 5 and "Rangoon Viceroy" Major General Myint Swe.

14. (C) Senior officers involved in last September's crackdown on protesters fared well. Rangoon Commander Hla Htay Win was promoted to Major General and Chief of Military training, a powerful position that controls military training overseas, including nuclear training in Russia. The 77th Light Infantry Division (LID) Commander Win Myint was promoted to Brigadier General and Rangoon Division Commander; 11th LID Commander Hla Myint was promoted to Brigadier General and Southern Commander; Brigadier General Kyaw Phyo, the former commander of the Military Staff College, was promoted to Major General and the Triangle Command; Brigadier General Soe Win, former commander of the Ba Htoo Military Training School, was promoted to Major General and the Northern Command; Brigadier General Yar Pyae was given the Eastern Command; Brigadier General Thaung Aye was transferred from the Eastern to the Western Command; and Brigadier General Maung Shein, reportedly renowned for his stupidity, was transferred from the Western to the Northeast Command.

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Changes in the Cabinet

15. (C) Commander in Chief of the Navy, Vice Admiral Soe Thein, was retired from the Military and appointed as Minister of Industry-2. Soe Thein's replacement is rumored to be Chief of Staff of the Navy, Nyan Htun, though we have yet to confirm this. Note: DAO comments that Nyan Tun is a U.S. IMET graduate of the U.S. Naval War College. He is fluent in English, friendly, outgoing, and reportedly likes the United States very much. End note. Former Ministry of Industry-2, Saw Lwin, has been appointed Minister of Immigration, which was previously filled by the Minister of Social Welfare Maung Maung Swe, wearing two hats. Also of note, Vice Senior General Maung Aye's personal assistant, Than Htut, was promoted from Colonel to Brigadier General and Commander of the 11th LID.

What it All Means

16. (C) The five senior generals remain in power, with Than Shwe retaining almost absolute power and all decision-making authority on issues of international and domestic importance. Nay Win Maung, a well-connected businessman and journalist (Ref A) and Tin Maung Thann, a businessman close to the Ministers of Fisheries and Agriculture, told pol/econ chief the changes do not reflect a significant shift in power. They believe the retirements and promotions were designed to move smart, qualified mid-level officers, who were frustrated by their long stay in the middle ranks, up the chain of command. These promotions recognize talent, they advised, considering these officers were some of the best and brightest of the Burma Army, except for former Western Commander Maung Shein.

17. (C) Phone Win, another well-connected businessman with close ties to high-levels of the Burma Army (Ref C), noted that several officers close to third-ranking General Thura

Shwe Mann had been passed up for promotion, and others promoted were close to Maung Aye. With these promotions, he commented, Than Shwe was trying to promote more neutral people to lessen Thura Shwe Mann's hold over the military to keep a balance of power. He speculated Thura Shwe Mann would depart from the military in 2010 to take a prominent political position in the new government, possibly the Presidency (Ref A).

¶8. (C) Phone Win added that Than Shwe was trying to "democratize in his own way," bringing up talented second-line officers to replace older first-line ones, who were resisting his movement forward on the "roadmap" for fear of losing personal and financial security in a revised political system.

A Little Too Much Greed?

¶9. (C) Phone Win also viewed the promotions as designed to signal the Senior General's displeasure with recent "mistakes" Thura Shwe Mann had made. According to Phone Win, Thura Shwe Mann had backed some brigadier generals for promotion to major generals, who had foreign citizen relatives, an automatic disqualification for this position. Also, too many people around Thura Shwe Mann were blatantly corrupt, Phone Win added. Shwe Mann had reportedly arranged for his former personal assistant to be given a deputy director generalship at the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications. This former personal assistant had reportedly been caught selling lucrative cell phone sim card permits by Than Shwe's son, who brought the corruption to the attention of his father.

Comment:

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¶10. (C) These most recent promotions do not mark a significant power shift, rather they signal that Senior General Than Shwe, planning for his future security, is aligning officers around him. This appears to be Than Shwe's opaque plan for a transition to a "democracy" appropriate for Burma. Even though it will not meet standards acceptable to the West, it might be a version acceptable to Burma's neighbors, who see the military as the best guarantor of stability and their own lucrative economic relationships in Burma.

¶11. (C) The isolation of and secrecy among Burma's top generals should not be overestimated. Some of Embassy Rangoon's contacts, many of them involved with local Cyclone Nargis relief efforts, have access to the recently promoted generals in key positions. These contacts urge us to take every opportunity to engage with the up-and-coming ranks of Burma's military, who may rise to more powerful positions in the future. According to these contacts, the U.S. military relief flights have caused some of these officers to take another more favorable look at U.S. actions in Burma. They see U.S. engagement in humanitarian assistance as a path for "safe" conversation with these interlocutors that could enable us to have greater, although admittedly gradual, influence over Burma's future. Without U.S. engagement, we will have even less of a voice than we do now over Burma's eventual transition. End comment.
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